

Iowa Department of Public Health Fiscal Year 2008 Annual Report

Iowa Communications Network Videoconferencing Savings Report



This report is prepared pursuant to Iowa Code, Chapter 8D.10

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ICN – A vital link

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) uses videoconferencing via the Iowa Communications Network (ICN) as an important link to public health workers, other government departments, and the general public. It is one of the most convenient and accessible forms of communication between IDPH and its partners.

The ICN system is a valuable resource to IDPH as well as the public. Not only does it quickly connect people in a time of need; it is also an effective and cost-saving tool for educating the public health work force and partnering with our constituents.

IDPH uses the ICN to connect the partners and downlinks broadcasts during the year. Many programs were sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and allowed for the health professionals in Iowa to be connected with public health experts from across the nation.

Accessibility is key

The accessibility of educational programs offered by other states and agencies via satellites by the public health professionals in Iowa is essential to maintaining a knowledgeable public health work force and assisting with the overall success of IDPH.

Satellite broadcasts are also an economical means for quickly sharing education and information. IDPH is fortunate to have the ability to continue the sharing process by transmitting the broadcasts to remote sites across the state by using the ICN system.

The ICN is the most accessible avenue for updating IDPH's constituents on important health issues. Thus, local agency staff, board members, and the public are more likely to participate on task forces or committees if the meetings are held using the ICN.

For many Iowans, a two-hour meeting in a single location such as Des Moines requires almost a full day away from their regular work. Since this is not a feasible option for most people, opportunities to participate and help guide state policies and programs are forfeited.

ICN sessions increase participation

The ICN has proven to be useful in other areas as well. Using the ICN for public hearings on proposed rules or grants has made them more convenient to interested parties throughout Iowa. In many cases, use of the ICN made it possible to hold training sessions that would probably not have occurred without the ICN. Additionally, participation in other training sessions was substantially increased because the sessions were offered locally to the majority of the participants over the ICN rather than only at a single distant site.

The public hearings, meetings of state boards, committees and advisory councils help shape public health's ability to develop policies, and mobilize community partnerships, as well as inform, educate, and empower people about health issues.

To ensure that every possible benefit from the ICN system is utilized, IDPH collects information during the year. This information is gathered via evaluations that are sent to the lead person who initiated the ICN event, as identified on the ICN reservation. Question categories include ICN event usages, alternate delivery options, participation rates, and repeat use of the ICN.

Evaluation comments illustrate benefits of ICN

“Using the ICN is a cost saving for all attending the meeting in mileage, salary and food. Also, more attend than if they had to travel to Des Moines in January.”

“ICN availability prevented WIC staff having to travel in bad weather. Participants were very pleased with the convenience of viewing this broadcast in their city rather than traveling a long distance or joining via conference call.”

“Using the ICN saved a state employee over 7 hours of driving time. This saved money not only in staff time but in gas expense.”

“Provided the opportunity to have input from a wider variety of stakeholders from across the state without the cost in time and travel expenses of a face-to-face meeting. Also holding the advisory group meeting was a condition of our grant funding.”

“Using the ICN allows us to maximize the use of our special project grant funds by limiting travel expenditures for project partners. More importantly it allows local agency personnel from across the state to participate rather than limiting participation to central Iowa based on travel costs and time.”

“It was nice to be part of this presentation and was only possible because of the ICN.”

“It was helpful to have the ICN available to participate in CDC trainings.”

“Very nice option for public hearing so people don't have to drive to Des Moines.”

Cost savings

The use of ICN videoconferencing has become an integral component of IDPH's operation. In FY' 08, approximately 8,950 people participated in ICN meetings. IDPH's cost savings using the ICN was \$862,382.70. As outlined in this report, the benefits realized by IDPH go beyond financial savings.